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Bibliotheca Spices Up the Library Ebook Market

Another ebook aggregator is about to enter the market, further whetting librarians' appetites and spicing up the market. This time, it is Bibliotheca, a global developer that supplies technologies designed to enhance library efficiency and the user experience (www.bibliotheca.com). More commonly known for its RFID and self-checkout systems, which it supplies to 3,000-plus libraries worldwide, Bibliotheca announced its intentions to support an open source ebook model in a press release on June 19, 2012, just before the American Library Association Annual Conference.

The plan has several objectives. First, create a library cooperative buying platform to lower acquisition costs for econtent by negotiating discounts with publishers. Second, integrate the solution seamlessly with all major integrated library systems (ILS) to create a user-friendly environment for patrons. Third, expand the digital content offered by publishers to libraries. In a nutshell, Bibliotheca hopes to empower libraries to take control of their digital content. This solution could not come soon enough due to libraries' dissatisfaction with the limited choices for downloadable digital content, particularly when it relates to ownership of content.

When I spoke with him at ALA, Shai Robkin, president of Bibliotheca in the Americas, said, "Hosting ebooks is a natural extension of Bibliotheca's existing services. Our self-service kiosks can facilitate an integrated process to deliver print and ebook content together." The idea for the project grew out of Robkin's conversations with librarians and publishers. He found a lot of frustration about the future of econtent delivery, with everyone moving in a different direction. "It became clear that there was no one nationally who was likely to grab this bull by the horns and do something with it." Robkin intends to roll out the model first in the U.S., followed by other markets Bibliotheca currently serves.

THE SPICE GIRLS PROCESS

Robkin and the team are in the fact-finding stage, or as he says he learned from a speaker at the recent Urban Libraries Council meeting, "The Spice Girls Process." "We are saying to librarians and publishers, 'Tell me what you want, what you really really want.'" He hopes to get to the core of publisher and library needs to find out what the priorities are for digital content delivery. Once the Bibliotheca team has an understanding of library and publisher core values, it

“Bibliotheca hopes to empower libraries to take control of their digital content.”

will move forward with the development work necessary to complete an all-encompassing solution.

Content discounts and integration with the ILS are the biggest concerns the team are hearing from librarians. Bibliotheca understands that ownership is an important objective for many in the library community and will explore its viability from multiple perspectives. Content ownership has been a core selling point for the 3M Cloud Library—more than 50 libraries are now live with its downloadable ebook service.

Publishers also have their preferred blend of herbs and spices, their own values and priorities for digital content delivery to libraries. Melissa Wood, national accounts manager for Sourcebooks (www.sourcebooks.com), for example, wants to guarantee that the distribution systems will be compatible with econtent versions and formats as they develop and change over time. “The key to making this work is for all parties to feel comfortable,” said Wood. “I love the principles of the project and hope to work with Bibliotheca and its partner libraries, to make sure this solution works for everyone.”

Thus far, Bibliotheca is receiving an overwhelming response from libraries and publishers. Robkin said, “We need people to come and attempt to punch holes in the model and the thinking. Now is the time. We want to get this right.” Open to all comments and suggestions on the model, from libraries and publishers, Bibliotheca encourages email contact (info@bibliotheca.com).

FAMILIAR MODEL

If the Bibliotheca initiative has a familiar taste, it should—it's based on the Douglas County Libraries (DCL) model that EBook Buzz reported on in the July/August 2012 issue of *ONLINE*. The Califa Group library consortium (www.califa.org) in California has also adopted the DCL model. Robkin said, “The principles remain the same, but the model may be a bit different from Douglas County. They established something that people look to with great respect and we hope that respect will bring the library community to work towards a comprehensive national solution.”

Not only is the model based on the DCL solution, but also two former DCL employees, Monique Sendze and Jordana Vincent, have taken positions with Bibliotheca to bring this product to fruition.

OPEN TECHNOLOGY

Sendze, senior vice president of the ebook division, will lead the technological development of the Bibliotheca platform. She said during an interview at the ALA Conference, “Bibliotheca intends to build an open system based on open standards. Front and back-end APIs (application program interfaces) will be available for libraries to connect with their existing integrated library systems and other discovery tools.” Bibliotheca is not interested in forcing libraries into adopting new technologies. Instead, the company wants to tie them into the back system functionality,



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which is based on an open architecture system. Sendze said the core of the Bibliotheca platform is the cooperative purchasing system.

An Adobe Content Server (ACS) will be used for digital rights management of PDF and EPUB for downloading or reading online via the cloud. Audio and video content will also be supported from this platform using a content distribution network (CDN). Sendze said it will probably have a Solr back end, which is an open-source search server based on the Lucene Java search library. For the database side, she will investigate Oracle or MySQL for a transactional database, one that will have to handle the potential load Bibliotheca is facing. Put in simpler terms for those of us who don't understand the programming alphabet soup, the Bibliotheca platform will be a hosted, cloud-based solution with the ability to download content to devices.

Data and analytics are important to the success of the program. Sendze plans to build a recommendation engine to crowdsource the reviews and interests of readers on a larger scale. This data can then be used by libraries for collection development purposes and by publishers for editorial development.

At this time there are no plans to develop e-readers, but as Sendze said, “If certain communities want readers, then we will look into this service.”

A TASTE OF CONTENT

Bibliotheca intends to become an ebook aggregator in cooperation and partnership with the library and publishing communities. It hopes to offer content suitable for public and academic libraries as well as spotlight unique and special local library collections. One of the core values it discovered from libraries is a strong desire to add local content to the platform.

Jordana Vincent, head of content and publisher relations, is responsible for forging natural alliances between libraries and publishers and developing content for the service. Vincent is confident that Bibliotheca will be able to sign publishers for the program rather quickly. More than 30 publishers stopped

by the Bibliotheca booth during the ALA conference, expressing their desire to collaborate on the project.

Why were so many flocking to Bibliotheca? According to Vincent, "Publishers are happy to have Bibliotheca ask them what they want. They appreciate the opportunity to give their opinion and not be told how their books will be sold and delivered." Vincent thinks that authors are part of the content development piece and hopes to work directly with self-published authors and self-publishing companies to acquire content. IPG (Independent Publishers Group) has been receptive to working with Bibliotheca, and Vincent is speaking with other independent and self-publishing companies. She hopes Bibliotheca's solution can support the growing interest in the library as content creator, giving libraries a publishing platform within the hosted solution.

Vincent will negotiate not only for content, but also for new business models. Her goal is to implement more creative

business models that will result in a win-win for publishers and libraries. Considering Vincent's and DCL's success with independent and small publishers, Bibliotheca should have an easy time adopting new business models with similar publishers. However, signing the Big Six for ownership models with discounts will be an uphill battle.

These titles are the most desired by library patrons. This means Bibliotheca will have to work even harder to pull libraries away from OverDrive, Inc., which until recently had a monopoly on (the few) Big Six downloadable content (3M announced a pilot project with Penguin Group and The New York Public Library in June 2012) and remain the only library aggregator to offer direct Kindle downloads.

SPICES FROM THE FARMERS' MARKET

Robkin compared the Bibliotheca program to a farmers' market co-op, where volunteers (libraries) support the co-op and maintain a certain level of the responsibilities (crowdsourcing relationships with publishers). Bibliotheca provides the administrative support for the co-op, by developing and maintaining the infrastructure. Robkin expects to charge libraries minimal administrative fees for quick entry into the system. Just how high will these administrative fees be? Robkin responded, "There is no need to be greedy."

Libraries have long desired a sustainable business model for digital downloadable content, which is why The State Library of Kansas did not renew its contract with OverDrive in 2011 and opted to do business with 3M. A not-for-profit solution would make libraries more secure about ongoing sustainable models. Since that solution has not yet presented itself, they will have to put their trust in Bibliotheca.

Both Vincent and Wood feel this trust will come easily, due to the leadership of Bibliotheca. Vincent said about Robkin, "He is so sincere about wanting to find the right solution, a solution to make all parties happy—including library patrons." Wood agreed, adding, "The solution is about the content—getting the content patrons need and want available to libraries." Wood believes that publishers who deny libraries access to content are keeping content away from the public.

NEGOTIATING FOR DISCOUNTS

Bibliotheca will negotiate with publishers for discounts on content. While the majority of these discounts will be passed on to the libraries, Bibliotheca will take a small percent of the discount savings.

Sendze plans to continue the Douglas County Libraries idea to provide a "buy now" button on all content. This will link users with the Bibliotheca book storefront for print or electronic content copies. The Bibliotheca library partners will benefit from shared revenue of eBook sales.

Robkin, Sendze, and Vincent hope to have a product to launch in the first half of 2013. Sendze said the greatest challenge right now is time—people want this now. The puzzle pieces are starting to fall into place, and Bibliotheca has the right people on board to lead the project forward.

Califa and Smashwords to Team Up

According to an article in *Library Journal's* Digital Shift from June 26, 2012, the Califa Group (www.califa.org) is "on the verge of striking a deal with Smashwords for outright ownership of its top-selling titles, which will also include a self-publishing option for patrons" (www.thedigitalshift.com/2012/06/ebooks/califa-lands-325000-in-funding-for-ebook-ownership-project-deal-close-with-smashwords). Califa, a consortia of 220 California libraries, will be able to purchase about 10,000 of the company's top titles for roughly \$3 per title. Titles will be loaded on its Adobe Content Server (ACS) and loaned out to one user at a time. A post on Califa's blog (<http://califaproducts.blogspot.com>) adds that it is conducting a naming contest for the new service.

Mark Coker, the CEO of Smashwords, Inc. (www.smashwords.com), is eager to work with libraries. He said in the *LJ* article, "They want to own the book and lend it out one at a time and we're very supportive of that." It's only a matter of time, then, before a variety of self-published titles makes its way into library digital collections.

Smashwords has already signed agreements with Baker & Taylor and 3M. Since reviews for self-published titles can be difficult to obtain, formulating a crowdsourced review system (based on user star ratings or overall use data across a vendor) for these titles will benefit libraries greatly.

Back in Colorado, Jamie LaRue, director of the Douglas County Libraries, is pushing on with his solution. "We are pursuing all channels at this time, including developing local content," he told me. LaRue thinks that if libraries can afford a locally hosted solution and have content they want to manage, they should buy their own server. Can he endorse the Bibliotheca platform? "Bibliotheca has the smarts to pull this off, and they have demonstrated an understanding and appreciation of the principles of ownership and library discounts. Will they be able to preserve those principles in the marketplace? We'll see. They have certainly hired some good people recently."

DIGITAL FUTURE

Is the future digital? If this move by Bibliotheca is any indication, then my answer is yes. It's not just the "flavor of the month"; it has lasting implications. In the past year, we've seen both 3M and Bibliotheca, two companies whose traditional library services include RFID and self-check machines, move into the digital environment.

This is not an indication that print will disappear or that libraries will have no need for RFID and self-check. However, it demonstrates the growing demand for digital content and future directions publishers and vendors must follow to maintain their existence in this volatile market. As for content ownership, discounts, and seamless integration with a



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library's ILS, that landscape is changing quickly. Libraries must continue their quest for a superior digital future. 3M, Douglas County Libraries, Califa, and Bibliotheca are leading this transition. New companies, business models, and access options will surely follow and spice up the digital content offerings even more.

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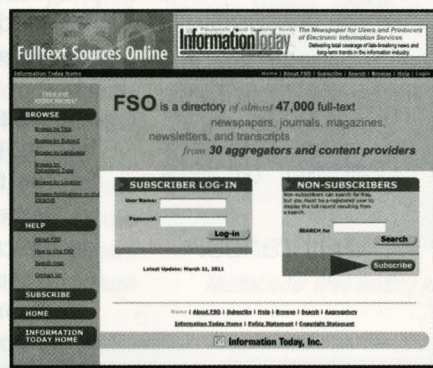
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